

L E T T E R

FROM A

CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN,

TO HIS

ROMAN CATHOLIC FRIEND.

*Examine all things; hold fast that which is good. 1 Ep. to
the Theſſal. chap. v.*

*Who art thou that judgeſt another man's ſervant? to his own
Lord he ſtandeth or falleth. Rom. xiv. 4.*

He that walketh uprightly, walketh ſecurely. Prov. x.

W O R C E S T E R:
P R I N T E D F O R T H E A U T H O R.
M. DCC. LXXX.

LETTER

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CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN,

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Examine all things; hold fast that which is good. 1 Th. 5.
The Thetian. chap. v.

It is not when we judge another man's private life to be wrong
that we should be called to account. Roman. 2.

He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone. John 8.

W O R D S T E R
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

M D C C L X X X.

To the READER.

THE following letter is not given to the public exactly in its original form, when addressed to a respectable Clergyman of the Roman Catholic communion. It has undergone some alterations, and is enlarged by several additional remarks; especially in the notes. The whole of it, however, being penned in a hurry, and written merely with a view to do justice to the cause of truth; it claims no other merit, but that of being candid and dispassionate. If it tends, in any degree, to root out prejudices, and promote Christian benevolence amongst his brethren, the author's most ambitious wishes will be gratified: And he will be ever happy in the recollection, that he shall not leave the world, without having, once at least, employed the little talents he was possessed of, to the general advantage of society.

TO THE READER.

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A

LETTER, &c.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING now, in great measure, settled both my mind and my affairs; I will begin, in a leisure moment, to acquit myself of a promise, which I made some time ago, of writing you a long letter. My silence hitherto has not been owing either to forgetfulness of your past favours, or to any unwillingness to acknowledge them. Be assured that I really esteem and respect you. But I did not chuse to write, till I could unfold all my mind to you: and this alone is the true cause of my delay. Before you receive this, I shall have left the worthy family in which I have lived for some years past in quality of Chaplain, and shall have laid aside the functions of a Missioner; being determined no longer to comply through human respect, with duties which I cannot esteem obligatory; nor to submit to a discipline which I have long considered as irrational in many points, and highly oppressive in others. The studies

to

to which I have applied myself, both when abroad, and since my return to England; my conversation amongst my friends, from whom I never endeavoured to conceal my sentiments and doubts *; and the observations which I have written long since upon these matters, should justify me from the imputation of having taken this step in a hurry, or to gratify any private passion, of whatever nature. But I do not expect, on this occasion, to be treated with candour or Christian forbearance. The sincere and virtuous Roman Catholic, full of zeal and prejudice, will be offended, and pity his deluded friend: The Bigot, wrapped up in his own fancied orthodoxy and pedant cant, will talk of scandal, *and thank his stars that he is virtuous*: The nominal Christian, whom birth, education, or convenience has attached to any particular mode of worship, will exclaim, and seek in his own breast for those sordid or selfish motives, with which he is himself actuated in all his pursuits, to account for the step that I have taken: and each will pass his judgment according to

* For the truth of this, I appeal to those of ever different persuasion, with whom I have been most intimately connected, and who have occasionally testified their surprise at the freedom with which I disclosed my sentiments and insinuated my difficulties, without either apprehension or disguise.

his own partial feelings: *But to me, it is a thing of the least account to be judged by — human judgment; — he who judgeth me, is the Lord.* 1 Cor. iv. Upon this account, I shall not enter into a discussion of this nature with every person who may be desirous of displaying his controversial talents, and making a parade of the *unanswerable* arguments which he has picked up in Catechisms, or such like elaborate performances. I will let him enjoy the victory with which he may flatter himself, without even endangering his triumph. But, if I have leisure, and my intention continues the same, I may, perhaps, submit to the judgment of the public some little essays, upon which his zealous endeavours may not be entirely thrown away †. Whatever
tends

† Since the above was written, I have communicated to some judicious friends amongst the Roman Catholics, two little pamphlets relative to this subject. They acknowledged them to be fair and candid: nor could they deny the truth of the observations therein contained; though they would not, perhaps, entirely admit the inferences which I drew from them. However, they insinuated that it might appear ungenerous to the impartial men of every persuasion, if, in the present circumstances of the Roman Catholics in England, a person who had received his education amongst them, and was thoroughly acquainted with their discipline, should publish any thing which might even tend to cast a ridicule upon it. They were, was it observed, actually making application to Government for some redress; and every liberal mind seemed disposed to admit the justness of their petition.

tends to the discovery of truth, should be received with candour ; and when once it is made manifest, it cannot too readily be embraced. Nay, even the very shadow of it should be pursued, in hopes of obtaining the reality at last. Yet, in this, as in every other pursuit, we should be moderate and diffident ; lest hurried away by our own prejudicated opinions, we ascribe to others, through an intemperate zeal, that guilt of obstinacy, which one day will be imputed to ourselves.

Would it not, then, be displaying an unchristian spirit, at such a juncture, to revive disputes which had so often been carried on with unforgiving animosity, and which now seemed almost entirely to have subsided ? To this just remark I have hitherto acquiesced. An attack of this nature, upon a body of men still obnoxious to many individuals of the established Church, might, perhaps, be thought to proceed rather from private resentment, than from a real regard for truth. I mean not, therefore, to give those who are enemies to all religion, a new cause of exultation at the divisions which unfortunately subsist amongst Christians ; and shall remain silent, unless called forth by any ungenerous usage, to speak in my own defence, or to vindicate my friends from the illiberal aspersions of the bigot, or the uninformed. But if they who are applying for toleration in their own religious sentiments, and to be screened from the oppressive hand of prosecution, should at that very time display a spirit of intolerance, and refuse to grant to others that same indulgence they so justly claim for themselves ; they cannot, surely, expect that such as feel themselves essentially wronged by this injustice, shall calmly sit down in passive acquiescence, and not endeavour to assert the rectitude of their own conduct, when reflected upon by such inconsistent and disingenuous zealots.

Verbal.

Verbal disputes seldom promote the cause of truth, and too often contribute only to breed animosities and personal disagreements: In these, therefore, I shall not willingly engage. But when we sit down coolly to write our sentiments, the controversy generally becomes more dispassionate. Yet, those who have been much conversant in Polemics must acknowledge, that even then, it is very rare to find a disputant who is but just equitable to his own cause, and who treats that of his adversary with real candour and fair-dealing †. Nor is this

† The greater part of the authorities which are adduced by Controvertists to establish any point which they undertake to prove, is not unfrequently entirely foreign to the purpose intended. Thus, for example, the passage of Joel, ch. iii. so often cited as a proof that on the day of general judgment before the final dissolution of the world, the whole race of men will be assembled together in the valley of Josaphat, has evidently no reference at all to that tremendous Catastrophe; but regards either the destruction of the Seleucidæ, or perhaps more probably, the defeat of the army of Cambyles in the valley of Jezrahel. See Houbigant and Calmet. In the same manner, those words of Matt. xviii. *He that will not hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen or a Publican*, were by no means spoken of the authority of the Church as an infallible guide, though often quoted in that sense; but, as appears from a bare inspection of the text, relate merely to a private disagreement between two persons, one of whom is supposed to have sinned against, or to have given offence to the other. After various charitable methods proposed in vain, to bring the offender to acknowledge and repair the wrong he had done his Brother, the injured party (for he that offereth an injury is always most implacable) and the whole Assembly of Christians, is admonished to avoid

this partiality to be wondered at; since Men mostly set forth with a firm persuasion that the opinion they have embraced is the only true one; and that every other sentiment can be adopted in appearance only, through motives of convenience, or,

his company as a fomentor of discord, an unforgiving man, who disturbed the peace of society. *Amen I say to you*, continues the text, *whatever you shall bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven*: that is, if you have thus used your best endeavours to effect the reconciliation of your brother, and he still refuses to do you justice; if you forgive him not, neither will he be forgiven in Heaven: but if you gain his heart and he desires to be reconciled, and you are satisfied with the atonement which he makes, then will his forgiveness be ratified in Heaven. So, at least, was this passage understood by Origen, Theophylact, St. Chrysostome, St. Austin, and other Ancients. Again; the Text which is brought from the same Evangelist, to prove the authority of the successors of St. Peter, *Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church*, is by most of the Fathers understood, not of the person of that Apostle; but either of Christ himself, or of the faith which St. Peter expressed in him as the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind and their Mediator, the end and object of the whole Gospel Dispensation. Upon this belief, as upon a firm Rock, was his Church to be established: See St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Hilary, St. Chrysostome, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory, St. Austin, Origen, &c. cited by Calmet. Hence, whatever may be the TRUE doctrine, with respect to the points supposed to be determined by the above-mentioned Texts, a question which I mean entirely to wave at present, it cannot, surely, be proved from these authorities.

It would be easy to produce a thousand similar instances of quotations thus misapplied, from the Ascetic or Controversial writings of every age, and every different society of Christians. So it is that the prejudices that arise from opinions embraced in early life, often lead astray the best of men, and will even imperceptibly insinuate themselves into the Writings of those who wish to be most fair and candid in their disquisitions.

at best, the passing conviction wrought by the fallacious arguments of sophistical Teachers. Hence many prejudiced Roman Catholics have been heard to say, that all who are not of *their* Church, are notwithstanding, convinced in their hearts of the truth of *their* doctrine: Though others, be it said in justice to their more liberal way of thinking, do not hesitate to affirm that the Man who is truly virtuous in his conduct, and sincere in his enquiries and belief, is essentially A GOOD MAN; and, as such, will be entitled to the benefits of Redemption §.

And,

§ I have known some amongst my Acquaintance, who when at liberty to unfold their mind without fear of censure, have candidly acknowledged that it was their private belief, that every person who was really thus disposed, to whatever body of Christians he was outwardly attached, had equal reason with any other, to determine that the Faith and practice to which he adhered, was that which the Almighty required of his Creatures. The concession was ingenuous; but by a Roman Catholic can never be admitted to be Orthodox. Others he will say, perhaps may possibly *believe* that they are in the right, but he is *assured* of it. To suppose it even possible that he may be in an Error, is to overthrow the very foundation upon which his Faith is built. From this system, doubtless, arises the opinion of many amongst the less moderate, that no one can be saved who does not actually die a Member of their Church. If at any time they can be brought to argue on this head, they appear, indeed, in speculation to admit that every sincere and virtuous Christian, essentially dies in the TRUE Church of Christ, by reason of the dispositions of his heart: But they soon reduce this seeming liberal acknowledgment, to a metaphysical case; by affirming, that if there really does exist any such person out of the

And, indeed, my worthy Friend, Belief is not to be commanded. It must be the result of Conviction; and Conviction must be raised by motives. The question is not, whether Almighty God cannot reveal more than the feeble intellects of Man can comprehend; but how far, and in what points he has been pleased to do it. It is an easy thing to say we believe, when we really do not; but to affirm that we do believe, what from the motives of Credibility we do not think revealed, is a falsehood which a Christian cannot justify*.

pale of the Roman Catholic communion, Almighty God would sooner send an Angel from above to convince him of his error before he died, than permit him to depart this life, without being even exteriorly brought over to his Flock. Far be it, however, from me to insinuate that this absurd idea is generally adopted. There are but few, I hope, who thus confidently presume to be acquainted with the secrets of Heaven, or to direct the counsels of the Almighty; *who point out those, to use the words of Job, xxxviii. 23. whom God reserves for the day of trouble, for the day of Battle and of War.* Houb.

* There are some of so conciliating a disposition, that they endeavour to persuade themselves, that they believe whatever they are not able to disprove; and are satisfied with saying, in general terms, that they hold for true everything which is taught by the Roman Catholic Church. But there is a great difference between suspending their assent, and actually believing. They are required firmly to believe; not, to withhold their judgment. Hence many who esteem themselves members of that Church, because united to it in Worship, would be found, if the Situation of their mind were impartially examined, not to be so in reality. But it must be acknowledged much easier to proceed thus quietly through life, than to submit to the *laborious* task of thinking for themselves, or, at least, of acting in conformity to their Feelings.

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As for my part, I believe in God, such as he has pleased to reveal himself to us in the Sacred Scriptures; and whatever else he has clearly taught therein. I believe in Jesus Christ my God and Saviour: And that unless we lead a Virtuous life, we can not be entitled to that state of ineffable happiness which he has promised to such as obey his Commandments. By him we have been assured that all who do his will, shall know his doctrine in every point essentially connected with his glory and their salvation, *Matt. vii. 21; xii. 50, &c.*: And it cannot be presumed without blasphemy, that Almighty God will ever permit any finally to miscarry, who seek sincerely to know his will, and who practise it in their lives. How far this is my case, let HIM determine to whom alone I am to stand or fall; and to HIM alone do I appeal. However Prejudice or Passion may, at one time of life or other, have betrayed me into Errors in speculation or Follies in practice, from which few are so highly favoured as to be totally exempt; yet, my hope is in that Supreme Being alone, whose friendship is my only wish, and whose displeasure is the only calamity I fear. Although from partial motives, I may occasionally have been hurried into

wrong;

wrong; still I ever have respected what was right. Even where my conduct has been faulty, my Religion has been sincere: And *this* I never will sacrifice to interest against my conscience, no more than I will my happiness, to opinion. This is, then, the real situation of my mind, and the sum of that belief, which I esteem alone essential to a Christian: Yet I leave to each the same liberty which I claim for myself. *Let us not judge one another any more*, says the Apostle, *Rom. xiv. 13. Let not him that eateth, despise him who eateth not: and he that eateth not, let him not judge of him that eateth*, *ib. 3.* I therefore hope that I shall never despise my brother because he differs from me in opinion; and am even firmly persuaded that the Religious sentiments of all men of candour and knowledge in every different society of Christians, are nearly alike, when they are fairly stated, and impartially discussed. Complying in outward practice with that established mode of worship, which, according to the lights they have received, appears most rational, they adore God in every Community which professes to serve and worship him in spirit and truth. Charity and universal benevolence are the essence of all Religion; for *he that loveth, fulfilleth the Law.* True piety
consists

consists much more in acts of Virtue, than in sublime speculations, which rather tend to feed the vanity of man, than to improve his heart: And the accursed are sent into eternal fire, *Matt. xxv.* not because of their want of faith; but because *the little ones were hungry, and they gave them not to eat; because they were dry, and they gave them not to drink.*

I am indeed convinced that HE whose love to his creatures was so excessive, would never have revealed to them any truth essential to their happiness and salvation, but in the clearest terms. How far I think this is the case with respect to many articles of the Roman Catholic Faith as enforced by present discipline, will appear in some future observations upon them, to which I refer for a further explanation of my sentiments in this regard†.

You will, perhaps, ask me; Why then have you, in these sentiments, so long continued in the observance of that Discipline you so much reprobate, or in the exercise of your Functions? Because being validly ordained, I still consider myself as a Priest of the Christian Church; because I neither

† The reason why this design is laid aside for the present, was given in a former note.

taught nor practised any thing vicious or immoral in the discharge of those functions †; and because speculative difficulties

† Whenever I make use of any expressions in speaking of the Roman Catholics, which seem severe or harsh, I have not in view what may strictly be called the FAITH (see Veron's Reg. Fidei), but the present DISCIPLINE of their Church. These, it appears to me, they often confound together, by excluding from their society every member, who will not submit to all their Ceremonial Laws. Yet, although in this I cannot but renounce their discipline as irrational and unjust, I respect their principles considered in a Moral light. It is but equity to acknowledge that however they may oftentimes have been calumniated through ignorance, prejudice, or malice; yet their manners in general are pure, and they are sincere in the Religion they profess. Their prepossessions in favour of their own opinions are violent and ungenerous: But in their lives they often practise the most unfeigned Virtues, and in their Doctrines they inculcate nothing which is either immoral in itself, or pernicious to society. After such a confession, it may be asked, what possibly can be my reasons for exposing myself to be no longer considered as a Member of so respectable a Body! But whoever will peruse this letter with a common degree of attention, will himself readily form the Answer. Because, though their discipline is not immoral, yet in many instances it is oppressive, and *they put a galling yoke upon the necks of their disciples*, Acts xv: Because I should by not acting in this manner, in my present situation of mind, be obliged to carry on a double part; teaching to others what I did not believe myself, and from an outward compliance with a form of worship which I could not approve, feigning a satisfaction in it which I did not feel. Nor could all the smiles and friendship of the many which I may now be exposed to forfeit, quiet the reproaches of my own heart under the two-fold charge of dissimulation in my sentiments, and hypocrisy in my conduct. Whereas, I hope by acting according to my own belief and feelings, to be able to derive comfort from reflection; to search for truth without bias, and practise Religion without Enthusiasm; to persevere in nothing which my conscience cannot justify, and to enjoy the innocent pleasures of social and domestic life with a grateful and contented heart.

should

should not immediately in such a case render a person totally idle and unactive. This would cause a total stagnation in life, and open the door to eternal confusion. What Anarchy would not ensue if Every individual in Society ceased to act, at the very moment he entertained a doubt concerning either the propriety or the obligation of the action he was going to perform. Sentiments imbibed in early youth are not relinquished without some regret: Conviction operates on the mind but by slow degrees: Neither are ancient habits so easily shaken off. And though I may now esteem some doctrines or practices of the Roman Church respectively ill-grounded or ridiculous, I do not therefore think myself entitled to pronounce them damnable or pernicious. Might I not be allowed to add, that the reason why so many men of every persuasion, in general rest contented with that mode of religious worship, in which they have been educated; is, because there are few so earnest as to make the study of Religion the occupation of their leisure hours, and fewer still who are so sincere as to expose themselves to any difficulties about their Belief. But is not this truly courting that friendship of the world which is an enmity to God? *Epistle*

of *St. James*, iv. 4. Besides, when a person aims not to be a Christian in his practice, it is a matter of little moment to what society of Christians he is attached: For every duty, however burdensome, is easily submitted to by him whose compliance reaches no farther than empty speculation.

A second quære which you will likely make, is: Do you, at least, still intend to remain in a state of Celibacy? To this, though an invidious question, I candidly will answer that I probably shall not; because I mean throughout to act consistently, and to be directed by Circumstances, not by Opinion. Indeed, I am convinced, that *Happy is the Man who hath a Virtuous Wife*; *Ecclus.* xxvi. 1. and that *Though the union of two friends is great, yet that of a Husband and Wife is still more perfect*; *ib.* xl. 23. For, *Where there is No fence, the possessions shall be laid waste; and where there is no Wife, a Man sighs in distress*: See Calmet and Houbigant. I, therefore, shall esteem myself most happy to associate for life with an amiable companion, whose sentiments may be congenial with my own, and who possesses those qualities which never fail to endear, an upright heart, a cultivated mind, and an
easy

easy chearful temper. In fine, it is my wish hence-forward to employ my days in being virtuous and happy, having already spent so many in Vain researches after the means of becoming so §.

§ As I have repeatedly declared my Sentiments with Regard to the different observances of the Roman Church, it will be useless perhaps to mention the Law of Celibacy annexed by its discipline, either to the Religious or the Ecclesiastical State. Although by a mistake which pretty generally prevails, the Form of Admission on these occasions is often supposed to include, at least an *implicit* Vow of Continency; yet such a Vow is not even insinuated in it. This, at least in the Rule of St. Benedict, to which alone the Votary engages to subscribe, is mentioned only as a Virtue to be acquired, not as a Duty to be practised, or a tie which can never be dissolved. Moreover my peculiar circumstances in this regard, have long since been well known to all for whom this address was principally designed. Nor is it more *explicitly* prescribed to the Candidate for Subdeaconship: For even then, it contains no more than a simple promise of observing the advice of the ordaining Bishop. Hence, whatever may be the opinion of many, because in Roman Catholic Countries these injunctions are esteemed of Indispensable precept; the fact must be admitted to be such as I have stated it. Neither can any gratuitous supposition erect it into an obligation of a higher nature than what the terms themselves import. This is a maxim in every Law both Civil and Ecclesiastical: And the Learned Veron acknowledges, (*Reg. Fid.*) that *all the practices of the Universal Church are not sufficient to establish an article of Faith*; nor, consequently, of COMMUNION. I said above, that the law of Celibacy was esteemed an *indispensable precept*; but, I also said by *many*. An evident proof has lately been held forth to the whole Universe, that this is not the opinion of *all*; since the Roman Pontif, when but a few years since he dissolved the Society of the Jesuits, declared them no longer bound to any of their *Religious Vows*, although in that Body they were taken in Explicit terms; but by the Plenitude of his power, granted to them all a general dispensation, and permitted them to return to a secular life.

Were I influenced in this by Passion only; alas! how easily might every wish be gratified, and appearances still be saved? But I have not yet learnt to act habitually the part of a disssembler. My enjoyments must be such as can please upon Reflection: And I never could bid my soul *be satisfied with happiness*, while my heart was racked with anguish and remorse. Yet this is not considered. It is faith alone about which men dispute; because every one, in this may venture to join the cry: Whereas a deviation from moral rectitude seems generally regarded merely as a personal Concern; and it would appear ridiculous to disquiet others for not practising those Virtues, to which ourselves were utter strangers.

This piece of Justice to my own feelings, will, I hope, not be judged misplaced in the present circumstances. I am aware it will be said by many a *devout* and *pious* Christian, that I changed my Sentiments that I might be at liberty to take a wife: Would it not, however, be perhaps more charitable and more true to say I took a wife, because I changed my Sentiments? But Charity and Truth are Virtues from the practice of which Devotes and Bigots have long since pleaded an Exemption.

You

You will here remind me of a letter which, by desire, I wrote on an occasion somewhat Similar to Mr. L——. The Particulars of it, I do not now recollect; but am satisfied that I said nothing which was not suggested by his peculiar Circumstances; and made no reflection upon his Conduct, which did not arise from what then appeared to me to be the true motive of his determination.

It must indeed be confessed that the motives of many amongst those who have laid aside the belief and practice in which they had been educated, may generally be traced through the various Steps by which they arrived at their supposed Conviction. Amongst secular persons, the possession of an estate or title, an increase of wealth, or other ambitious Views, have often been the evident cause of their Change: But they whom such unjustifiable motives could alone determine; or who, amongst any set of Christians, were a disgrace to their belief by the immorality of their lives, can never be deemed a valuable acquisition to the party they embrace, unless, by a change of Conduct, they evince the disinterestedness of their motives.

Amongst the Clergy, a supine neglect of the duties of their Calling; a total in-application

application to the Studies of Scripture and morality ; a Spirit of Levity, if not of Irreligion ; and an over-fondness for the pleasures and amusements of a dissipated life, have generally been the forerunners of their change : And their behaviour afterwards seldom proves that their motives were of so impartial a nature, as they would willingly persuade both the World and themselves. They seldom display in their lives a greater share either of domestic or social Virtues ; and very rarely become more temperate, more chaste, more Religious ; or in any respect shew themselves better Citizens, or better men. This, alas ! is too frequently the Case. How far it may be applicable on each particular occasion, we should leave to HIM who has reserved to himself the right to judge ; who has repeatedly cautioned us NOT TO CONDEMN, LEST WE BE CONDEMNED : For, BY THE SAME MEASURE, BY WHICH WE MEASURE TO OTHERS, IT ALSO SHALL BE MEASURED TO OURSELVES.

As for my part, it is sufficiently known that my whole life has been taken up in an almost uninterrupted course of serious occupations ; and it is highly probable that I shall still pursue, in great measure,
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the same plan. The general tenour of my conduct has been such, (for where is the man who can assert with truth, that he never failed?) that I have been blessed with the esteem and friendship of most of those in every rank and set of men with whom I have been connected. Thus much, I believe, the various letters which I still have in my possession from persons of unquestionable character will evince; nor will my worst enemies, if any I have, refuse to acknowledge. As for the illiberal reflections which may now be made either upon my past life, or my present determination, I from my heart despise them; and can but pity those who so little esteem themselves as to descend to such contemptible methods of promoting their malevolent purposes *.

* I am sorry to say that most Sectaries, whenever any Person relinquishes the discipline of their Society, too frequently Manifest a Want of Charity and an unforgiving disposition very inconsistent with the Genuine Spirit of Christianity, and the Principles of mutual benevolence and toleration, so much cried up in this Enlightened Age. They imagine, doubtless, that in this *they render a service to God*, John xvi. but they should call to mind, with bitter remembrance, what Deluges of blood have been wantonly spilt by Fanatics, since the Establishment of Christianity, under this specious, but illusory pretence. He who discovers even a cool indifference to his separate Brother, merely because he differs from him in his Religious Sentiments, sufficiently intimates by such behaviour, that, were his power equal to his Enthusiasm, the greatest Extremities might be apprehended from his mistaken Zeal.

As

As I still hope for the favour of your correspondence, if I print any little essays relative to Religious Controversy, I will by the first opportunity, communicate them to you. Were the Christian System reduced to its primitive simplicity, such as it appears in the written word of God, freed from all the idle speculations of Men, and divested of all the unintelligible Creeds and Arbitrary laws obtruded upon Christians; we should all, again be of the same faith, and not be perpetually dealing about Anathema's against each other †.

This is that faith against which the Gates of Hell were never to prevail, *Matt.* xvi.; the Knowledge and worship of one God, and the Incarnation and meritorious Sacrifice of Christ, the fundamental articles of the Christian Dispensation, which had hitherto been but partially known or

† How different was the mild and wise Conclusion of the first council of Jerusalem held by the Apostles, *Acts*, chap. xv. from the dreadful Anathema's of those which were assembled in after ages, by their successors? *Observe these things*, said these Fathers of their people, (i. e. things looked upon in practice as Essential and Necessary, ver. 28) *and you will do well, adieu.* Whereas, the Councils subsequent to this, soon laid aside that meek and simple style: For in disputes upon points which were merely speculative and beyond the contracted reach of Man's feeble comprehension, they generally finished their determinations with that tremendous Anathema, *Believe this, or be accursed for Ever.*

were almost entirely obliterated in the minds of men. The belief of these sublime and comfortable truths was henceforth never to be set aside on Earth : And Christians were to form for Ever a Considerable and visible Body, to which all mankind should have free access, and which was to continue till time should be no more *. But the misfortune is, that the Religion and belief, as it is abusively called,

* Whoever admits the Existence of a Tribunal established on Earth by Christ, which was to be secure from Error and incapable of Mistake, must, from this principle, adopt the Roman Catholic persuasion. But many may, perhaps, be convinced that it is no more essential to have an infallible guide to direct us to a right belief, than it is to have an infallible Criterion to direct our taste in the Choice of food, some species of which, however beautiful and desirable to the Senses, are mortal in the effects which they produce on the human constitution. Now, as Almighty God has not vouchsafed us in a point so essentially connected with our very existence, any such infallible Criterion to distinguish what is salutary, from what is poisonous ; wherefore should we presume, from a few controverted texts of Scripture, that he had granted it to us in matters of so much less concern ? For, whether a Man believes or does not believe a few speculative truths ; as for example, whether Christ is verily and indeed received in the Eucharist by the application of his Merits and Satisfaction to the faithful Soul, or verily and indeed, in a Corporeal and Substantial presence, is surely a matter of no essential Concern either to the Glory of God or the Existence of Religion and Morality. A person who does, or does not believe this Article, may equally acquit himself with scrupulous exactitude, of every Duty ; he may *walk in all the commands of God, without reproof* ; he may, in fine, still *love his God above all things, and his Neighbour as himself*, which Christ assures us, is a perfect completion of the law and of the Prophets.

of the Generality of men is now built upon the Arbitrary doctrines of Theologians and Expositors, who explain every text of Scripture in the Sense which favours that System which they have adopted; and not upon the Word of God itself, according to its plain and obvious meaning.

When I reflect upon the Various Incidents of my past life, I often think that I can discover the finger of a merciful Providence, which makes those very causes which seem most likely to contribute to, or to occasion the misery of its Creatures, co-operate to their happiness. There are some Circumstances in it which appear truly singular; and I have oftentimes been tempted to sketch out a short account of a Certain period of it. But many Scenes of Ridicule and oppression, which Candour obliges me in great measure to ascribe rather to the private passions of Individuals, than to the Spirit of the Institute, and which I must in such a case essentially have recorded, appeared upon recollection so perfectly absurd, that I was willing to dismiss the Subject. It might have given some uneasiness to Persons whom I really respect: And I hope I never shall forget, that I am at Variance with their practices, not with their persons.

You

You will now, I suppose, no longer consider me as a *Roman Catholic*; yet I still hope that I am a Catholic Christian. My sole intention is to withdraw myself from the yoke of such practices, and the belief of such articles as appear to me trifling, oppressive, or ill-grounded. This is a just distinction, though you, perhaps, may not admit it †. Veron himself has shewn in his *Regula Fidei*, that *It is not of faith that any human law—Can bind the Conscience under mortal Sin*: Though he afterwards does away this very assertion, by the merest quibble in nature. But I must again repeat that it is not my intention to engage myself in the endless maze of Controversy, on which so much already has

† The worthy gentleman to whom this letter was addressed, asks me in his reply: Would you then advise me also and your other Roman Catholic Friends to take the same Step which you have done, and imitate the Example you have set them? I certainly would not by any means, whilst they are persuaded that Almighty God requires of them that they still adhere to the sentiments and practices in which they have been Educated. We are not to act against our conscience, though Erroneous. I never could Esteem the man, who, sway'd by no other motives than those of Interest or temporal Advantage, should either accede to or abandon the Worship of his Fathers: But, on the other hand, I must for ever reverence and admire those who are Sincere in the Religious Sentiments they embrace, however different from mine. They who are hypocrites in Religion, will be no less so in Civil life; and with Dissemblers it is my Ardent wish never to associate.

been

been said to little purpose. Such altercations serve in general much more to display and perpetuate prejudice and passion, than to advance the cause of Morality and Truth. Let every one determine according to the lights he has received, and endeavour, above all things, to *keep up the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace.* Ephes. iv.

Believe me, DEAR SIR, with real Esteem and Friendship,

Your much obliged, and

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Obedient humble Servant,

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